CHAPTER SIX

SWEDEN AND THE POMERANIAN WAR

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On 13 September 1757, in the early morning hours, at Loitz in Pomerania a column of Swedish soldiers crossed the river Peene on a pontoon-bridge and marched ten kilometers through Prussian territory, before they occupied the undefended town of Demmin. Further east along the Peene, other Swedish soldiers from the Södermanland Infantry Regiment left the hamlet of Peenendam, where they had been hiding during the night, and rushed across the bridge over the river into the Prussian border town of Anklam. Luckily for the Swedes, the city gate had been left open and the entire garrison of some twenty soldiers could be taken prisoner. On the small island-fortress of Anklamer Fähre further down the river, fifty grenadiers from the Södermanland Infantry rushed ashore from boats and captured the thirty-five men strong Prussian garrison together with sixteen artillery-pieces, large quantities of ammunition, flour, sail and tackle, as well as a number of cargo-ships. A few hours later, when the Diet of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation assembled in Regensburg, Sweden’s representative Johan August Greiffenheim read out a declaration, proclaiming that since Prussia had disturbed peace and order in the Empire and Sweden was a guarantor of the 1648-peace treaty of Westphalia, his sovereign had been obliged to invade Prussian territory.1 In this way, Sweden entered the Seven Years’ War.

After the defeat in the Great Nordic War (1700–1721), regaining the lost Baltic empire had become a central theme in Swedish foreign policy. During the eighteenth century, these ambitions led to two ill-advised wars against Russia (in 1741 and in 1788), and they were also the main cause for Sweden’s intervention in the Seven Years’ War. The aim was to recover territories, which had been lost to Prussia after military setbacks in 1679 and 1720. Although the Seven Years’ War was a struggle of global dimensions, in Sweden it is generally referred to as the “Pomeranian War”, which

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1 Teofran Säve, Sveriges deltagande i sjuåriga kriget åren 1757–1762 (Stockholm, 1915), 74–76.
underlines the regional character of Swedish involvement. The theatre of operations was limited to northern Germany, where Sweden’s bridgehead in Pomerania dated back to the 1630s.

Traditionally, Prussia’s survival against the superior coalition of hostile powers in the Seven Years’ War has been described as something of a miracle. Only in recent decades, historians have challenged this view, pointing out the higher efficiency – or ruthlessness – of the Prussian state in mobilizing resources, as well as the structural problems, which confronted any group of states in the eighteenth century which tried to coordinate their diplomacy and military operations in several theatres simultaneously.2

Sweden’s ability or ambition to contribute to the common strategic effort of the anti-Prussian coalition was no greater than that of any other member state. There were in theory two main operational directions for the Swedish troops in Pomerania. Either, they could advance southwards, directly on Berlin, Prussia’s weakly defended capital, seeking to coordinate their movements with those of Austrian or French troops further south and west. Or, the Swedes could advance eastwards along the Baltic coast against Stettin (present-day Szczecin in Poland), to cooperate with the Russians in East Prussia. The latter choice could be motivated by the argument that flanks and rear must be secured before any push against Berlin could be made. From a Swedish point of view, a more important argument to march against Stettin was the fact that before 1720 it had been the capital of Swedish Pomerania.

As we shall see, Sweden lacked the military strength to realize any of these two options. When participation in the war finally ceased in early 1762, there had been no territorial conquests, nor any other significant gains. At least 30,000 Swedish soldiers had lost their lives – the overwhelming majority because of disease – and like other countries which participated in the Seven Years’ War, Sweden also suffered a near-collapse in government finances. The war costs were estimated at 62 million Daler (in silver coins) – a sum equivalent to the entire national debt.3

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